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AUTHOR Mesenburg, Richard J.
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ABSTRACT

School site management, a decentralized approach to decision-making and school governance, is intended to help parents and teachers share increased accountability for student learning and provide a broadened leadership base through teacher empowerment. This approach involves a shift of decision-making responsibility from the school district to individual schools. Change efforts are most successful when schools' idiosyncratic characteristics are considered and when teachers are involved in initiating, planning, and implementing change programs. This paper briefly analyzes differences between traditional centralized decision-making patterns and the school site model and discussess Minnesota Educational Effectiveness Program (MEEP) efforts to provide strategies for alternative organizational instruction patterns leading to improved student learning. The paper also outlines factors influencing successful change efforts and describes a survey sent to 330 MEEP sites. Results indicate that when MEEP is used, local schools (1) set clearly defined goals; (2) establish a climate supporting these goals within the first two years; (3) establish a collaborative planning process; and (4) develop collegial relationships as a precursor to implementation. The paper concludes by recommending continued legislation and funding to support the MEEP program. (MLH)

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The Relationship of School Site Management to The Minnesota Educational Effectiveness Program

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Developed by:

Richard J. Mesenburg
Supervisor, Staff Development and
Instructional Design

Minnesota Department of Education

November 18, 1987

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"... the essential next step for education reform is to empower school boards, superintendents, principals, teachers and community members with the tools they need to create a new climate that helps students learn better and at the same time to get people in those positions who can do the job."
(Clinton, 1987)

Introduction

School site management is defined as an approach to the decentralization of decision making and the governance of schools. It is based on the premise that moving the locus of control and decision making closer to the level of implementation will result in parents and teachers sharing an increased accountability for student learning. In addition, it provides a broadened base of leadership through the empowerment of teachers. The change in the locus of control also facilitates the implementation of the research on planned change, including the concept that involving staff in the identification of needs, the formulation of plans to respond to those needs and the implementation of that planning result in more effective implementation of the change process The key to putting this premise into the life of the school is a management shift of decision making responsibility from the school district to the school site.

The concept of school site management has been incorporated into the Minnesota Educational Effectiveness Program (MEEP) since its inception. It exists today as one of fifteen research based characteristics of effective schools as described in the MEEP.

Characteristic # 4

"The school has school site management with considerable autonomy in determining the exact means by which the goals and expectations are to be met."

The critical variables which need to be considered for planned change occur at the school level. The school site has also been identified by research as the best locale for staff development to occur. Schools which have the autonomy to determine how to solve the problems related to increasing academic performance are more likely to institutionalize innovative programs.
Studies have also shown the local site to be the place where social, political and historical forces impact practice; therefore the idiosyncratic characteristics of a school must be considered when change is being made. Effective change efforts have been characterized by involving teachers in the initiation, planning, and conducting of change programs.

Traditionally, centralized educational decision making has followed a hierarchical pattern with the most power residing with the school board and the least power with the students. This paradigm changes when school site management is implemented.

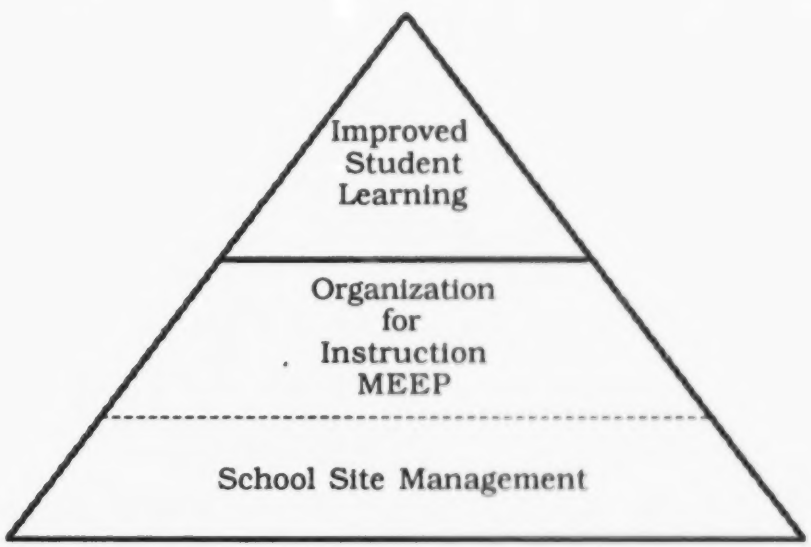
School site management differs from this paradigm in the following ways:

1. Policy and budgeting decisions which are predetermined in consultation with the school board are made at the building level.

2. The authority for certain functions are moved to the local building site. ie. staffing decisions, budget decisions etc., therefore developing a broader leadership base.

3. Power is shared by all persons concerned with improving the educational program. ie. students, parents, and staff of the building.

The Minnesota Educational Effectiveness Program is premised on a research base which describes what schools do organizationally and instructionally to improve student learning outcomes. School site management provides the structure for accountability and the implementation of planned change as described above. These factors, when implemented through the Minnesota Educational Effectiveness Program, provide the school with the strategies for alternative organizational patterns for instruction which may lead to improved student learning. The model which follows graphically describes this relationship.



The school building has been identified as the most appropriate site for planned change to occur. When the individual school is provided with the opportunity to engage in decision making, (1) the potential for improved student learning is increased, (2) staff members are empowered in legitimate ways, (3) ownership for actions increases and (4) acceptance of accountability increases at all levels.

The school site may be more successful at planned change efforts for the following reasons:

1. Staff of the school site takes into consideration the "culture" of the school.

   Research evidence indicates that each school has its own unique patterns of thought and behavior and people who are most directly involved making decisions about that school do so.

2. The school site allows for planning by the faculty.

   Faculty should be involved because they are the ones making behavioral changes and consequently they must be aware of the changes which result . In addition, involvement in decision making results in greater ownership and commitment to the outcomes.

3. Decision making at the school site allows training to meet identified needs.

   An assessment of needs conducted on site which allows the appropriate development of site based staff development which can respond to the specific needs of the staff.

4. The school site allows for a "problem solving" view of change.

   Because school site management supports involvement by all parties in the operation of the school, a needs based decision model can be used to assess needs and determine a school improvement plan.

5. Resource allocations can be made in response to identified needs.

   When resources are allocated in response to building needs the potential for overall saving increases.

Decision making proceeds not by "recommendations up, orders down," but through the development of a shared sense of direction among the decision makers. School site management forms the philosophical basis for ultimately improving student learning through the conceptual framework that knowledge is power and the wider the spread of knowledge the greater the distribution of that power. When school site management is implemented, people are empowered by knowledge, and they assert the right to be policy makers. The process of participatory decision making implies the sharing of extensive information, widely disseminated, and feedback, seriously considered.

Minnesota Educational Effectiveness Site Involvement with School Site Management.

A letter, (see attachment A), was sent to the 330 MEEP sites (in 165 local districts) on September 2, 1987 requesting that the superintendent indicate the degree to which they have implemented the characteristic of the MEEP model related to school site management. Twenty four of those districts representing fifty six schools have responded. These responses can be categorized into three groups. (1) schools/districts who report no activity at this time with school site management, (2) schools/districts who report a minimal involvement with some aspects of school site management and (3) schools/districts who have implemented school site management concepts to a moderate degree.

School districts who report no involvement

Twelve of the districts representing twenty five (25) schools report that they are not yet implementing the school site management characteristic, rather they are dealing with other characteristics such as climate, clearly defined goals, and others.

School districts who report minimal involvement

Three districts representing seven (7) schools reported beginning levels of implementation of the process This involvement ranged from the projection of Curriculum Advisory Committee membership as a transition to a school site management team; to one district which is providing limited budget discretion to its schools. Research results indicate that the schools implementing MEEP deal with the characteristics of clearly defined goals and expectations, and issues related to school climate for the first twelve to eighteen months of implementation It is therefore, reasonable to expect that these schools will focus on characteristics such as school site management as implementation of MEEP continues in subsequent years.

School districts who report moderate involvement

Nine districts representing twenty four (24) schools have reported that they are moderately involved with school site management. All of these sites delegate decisions about staffing to the individual schools. Seven of the districts representing eighteen schools report that budget decisions are delegated to the local site. Five districts representing thirteen schools report that they have parental/community involvement in the school site committees. One district representing two schools reports that curricular and extra curricular decisions have also been delegated.

Conclusions

School site management, when implemented as part of an integrated change model as defined in the Minnesota Educational Effectiveness Program, provides a vehicle through which a school may manage the processes which will lead to the successful implementation of a school site management process. The research results which the MEEP is gathering indicate that when MEEP is used the following are more likely to occur:

* a local school address the issues of clearly defined goals during the first twelve to eighteen months of implementation,
* establishes a climate that supports those goals within the first twenty four months,
* establishes a collaborative planning processes, and
* develops collegial relationships as precursors to the implementation of a school site management process.

The characteristics of goal setting, climate and collaborative planning are important because the activity which assures their implementation is important to the success of school site management.

Recommendations

* School site management should be implemented as a part of the MEEP or equivalent school improvement effort.
* Legislation should continue to support this relationship.
* Schools implementing school improvement processes should be provided fiscal support through legislation.

Attachment A

Minnesota Department of Education

Capitol Square 550 Cedar Street Saint Paul, Minnesota 55101

TO: Superintendents of Minnesota Educational Effectiveness Program School Sites

FROM: Richard J. Mesenburg, Supervisor
Staff Development and Instructional Implementation

DATE: September 2, 1987

SUBJECT: **Implementation of School Site Management**

As you know, school site management is one of the characteristics of the Minnesota Educational Effectiveness Program. Some legislators, and others, have expressed strong interest during the past legislative session in this concept and legislation was introduced to create school site management programs throughout the state. The legislation which was subsequently adopted describes the school board's role and defines the composition of the management teams. This legislation (M.S. 123.951, Section 22) continues to generate interest.

I have been asked by Assistant Commissioner Jim Sauter to survey the MEEP sites to determine how many districts have adopted school site management programs and the extent to which time, dollars, space, and staff resources have been delegated to the school site. A second strong area of interest is the extent to which parents and other community members are involved in the management of the school and what role those parents play.

Please send me any relevant information about your school district which would allow me to respond to these questions. If you have questions regarding my request, please feel free to contact me at 612-296-4064.

RJM:mhMg

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